

NATURE

naps

Get outdoors with your little one this summer. Here are some great sanity-saving walks so your child can nap in nature and you can get some much-needed fresh air and exercise. It's a win-win! **By Lizzy Sutcliffe***

At around 3 months old, my bonny, red-headed baby got sick for the first time. He stopped sleeping and embarked on a week of inconsolable gloom – ultimately for us both. We were staying with friends in Golden Bay and I felt there was little I could do to get us out of what was, looking back, a dark moment for me as a new mum. Luckily, on my third day, wanting to give my hosts a break, I discovered the buggy-friendly sanctuary of Te Waikoropupū Springs.

The gentle walk winds through native vegetation until reaching the treasured, untouchable springs – translucent and vibrant. As I strolled through this refreshing place, my son slept for, seemingly, the first time in days. I had found a remedy for us both and organised a walk every day for the rest of our stay.

Inspired by my experience in Golden Bay, I continued to combine naptime with walks wherever I could, taking my baby carrier when the buggy wasn't an option. Even when I was tired and could see a billion things around me that I ought to be doing, I told myself that getting us both out of the house and into nature (even for 20 minutes) was without doubt my top priority.

As my boy grew older and heavier, I found the buggy quickly became my preferred choice for longer walks, allowing me the option to park up, curl up and soak up nature where possible.

An added bonus was the ability to walk with friends, de-stressing, offloading our parental horror stories (and joys of course) and actually managing to finish our sentences for once as our little ones dozed. Some swore by baby carriers or slings or buggies; all of us appreciated the importance and benefits of these walks in keeping us sane and invigorated.

buggy-friendly nature walks for summer breaks

Exercising in nature is increasingly being recognised as a tonic for body, mind and soul. Research is showing that alongside physical health benefits, outdoor activities in green spaces can raise self-esteem levels and leave people significantly less angry, depressed, confused and tense. Mums and dads are being encouraged to take advantage of these benefits and join buggy walking groups across the globe, including New Zealand.

And, with the summer break coming up, you needn't let your travels hinder your walking routine. Below is a list of suggested Department of Conservation tracks for holidaying parents that are toddler and buggy friendly. Several include steps or steep slopes and require suitable off-road buggies, so please take care and check conditions before heading out.

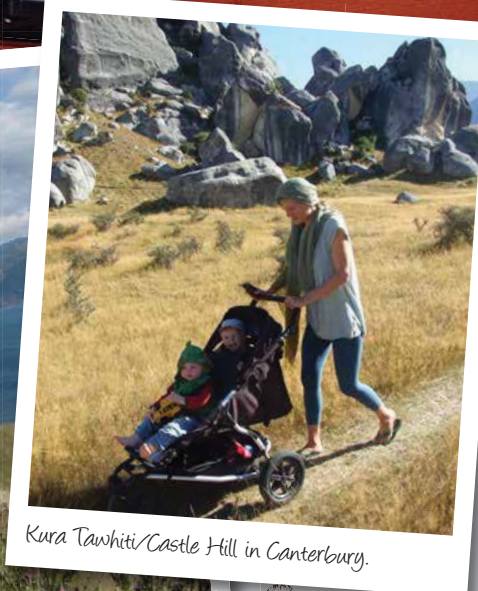
Lake Matheson Walk, Fox Glacier, West Coast

Location: 6km from Fox Village on Lake Matheson Rd
Time: 45 min–1 hr 30 min

A beautiful walk set in ancient forest famous for mirror views of the Southern Alps. You can choose the shorter walk to the jetty or do the more challenging (includes some steps) 2.6 km lake circuit.



A beautiful day on the Kaikoura Peninsula Walkway.



Kura Tawhiti/Castle Hill in Canterbury.



My boy ditches the buggy and goes for his first walk at Cape Foulwind on the West Coast.

Old Coach Road, Arthur's Pass

Location: This walk starts at Greyneys Shelter, 6km east of Arthur's Pass Village on SH73.

Time: 30 min return

This easy family walk is suitable for all-terrain buggies, and loops through the beech forest following the old coach road. At the northern end of the track there is a rope handrail – shut your eyes and use your other senses as you move through the forest.

Big Tree Walk, Peel Forest, South Canterbury

Location: This short, easy walk starts from the Te Wanahu picnic shelter and leads into Mills Bush.

Time: 15 min

An easy access, short walk at Peel Forest. Great for the whole family – take a picnic and explore the forest with its huge kahikatea and tōtara trees. Several large kahikatea and huge tōtara, one almost three metres across, are thought to be about 1,000 years old. These giants of the forest are known as rakau rangatira or chiefly trees.

Tawa Grove Walk, Catchpool Valley

Location: 45 minute drive from Wellington

Time: 30 min, loop

Tawa Grove in Catchpool Valley is a bush trail specially designed for wheelchair access and is ideal for buggies. The walk begins from near the Catchpool field centre.

Rimutaka Rail Trail, Rimutaka Forest Park, Wairarapa

Location: Turn off SH2, 9km north of Upper Hutt (the turn off is signposted to Pakuratahi Forest). 18km one way from Kaitoke to Cross Creek carpark (or as long as you want to push the buggy).

Built in 1878, this rail route between the Hutt Valley and Featherston is now a gently graded 18km walk or mountain bike ride. This makes it an ideal trip for families with children. The trail is also popular with dog walkers.

Potaema Track and East Egmont Lookout, Egmont National Park, Taranaki

These walks are maintained to wheelchair standard, so are great for families with a baby on board.

Potaema Track

Location: This track starts at the Potaema Picnic Area about 3km in from the park boundary on Pembroke Road.

Time: 30 min

Raised boardwalks take you through lush lowland forest made up of rimu-rata/kamahia, kahikatia and mountain totara/pokaka. The track leads to a large lowland bog that sustains a wide variety of flora and fauna.

Magnificent views of the mountain can be had across the swamp from the viewing area.

East Egmont Lookout

Location: This track begins at the end of the road at the Stratford Plateau.

Time: 30 min

Take a right hand turn just below the carpark toilets and follow the signs to the lookout. Here you will have spectacular views up the mountain and down to the Taranaki ring plain. See how plant types change with the altitude.

**Lizzie is a mum of one and works for the Department of Conservation.*

You can check for safety alerts and get more information about what to expect from these and other easy access tracks by visiting DOC's **website www.doc.govt.nz**

A good source of information on the value of exercising outdoors (green exercise) can be found on the UK's University of Essex **website: www.greenexercise.org**